

## Cultural knowledge

When you are travelling in Chinese-speaking countries, you will find that the words and phrases you use most frequently will be the common Chinese greetings. These words and phrases will quickly become second nature to you because you will use them day in and day out with everyone you come across.



### 作揖 A gesture of greeting

双手叠抱胸前致意之礼，视对象稍有分别。一般双手叠抱举前轻轻晃动，身略前倾，表示问候、致谢、邀请、讨教等，同时常伴以谦词。叠抱之手上下大划称为“长揖”，屈身行之称为“打躬”。

As you would expect, you should use a polite greeting when you run into someone you know or want to know. However, in Chinese – speaking countries, greetings are given a much importance then they are in America. It is often considered as a way to measure if a person is polite or educated by a simple form of greeting among Chinese people. Children are expected to greet their elder relatives or family friends

whenever they see them. Students are expected to greet their teachers in and out of the campus. Acquaintance greets each other either by calling out each other's names. It is important that the younger person or minors initiate greetings first. It is considered to be polite for minors to greet the elders at any time.

China was a land of Rites, and for this reason, social etiquettes in the past had been rather elaborate with various greetings symbolizing different meaning and purpose.

## **1. Hand-shake Greeting**



This is probably the most common way of greeting for Chinese.

This means that when two persons meet, they will shake hand with one another (usually using the right hand). When they say good bye to each other, they also shake hand. Hand-shaking is not originally a Chinese practice. However Chinese people adopted as their way of greeting people from Europe and North America. Hand-shaking is considered a polite way of making a relationship closer. Hand-shaking has actually become the most common way of greeting among the world.

A simple handshake would suffice, possibly combined with a slight bow. Strong handshakes are not really the norm and many an American or European has commented on the limpness of the Chinese handshake.

## **2. Traditional Hand/Fist-Wrapping of Chinese (known as "Gong Shou 拱手")**

I am not too sure whether the translation of "Gong Shou 拱手" to "hand/fist-wrapping" is correct, so correct me if I'm wrong. But Gong Shou has the general meaning of "submissive". It generally means "give in to someone".

Gong Shou is a common traditional practice of greeting among the Chinese, notably during the traditional Chinese festival such as Chinese New Year, marriage ceremony, between neighbors, friends, colleagues etc. It is polite way of representing respect, blessing and wishes. It is also practiced when saying good-bye. To practice such greeting, the common way is to stand up with your upper body fully upright, extend your two elbows, then wrap your two hands/fists together as one in front of your chest (usually the left fist will be clenched, while the right palm will wrap the left fist). After wrapping the fist together, just shake the together up/down many times. (You will probably see this common practice in Chinese kungfu movie or historical drama series).



Gong Shou is usually accompanied by traditional Chinese greeting words such as "Gong Xi Gong Xi 恭喜,恭喜" (Congratulations! Congratulations! ), "Jiu Yang Jiu Yang 久仰、久仰" (Long Time No See), "Qing Duo Duo Guan Zhao 请多多关照" (Please take good care) , "Jie Ri Guai Le 节日快乐" (Happy Festival) , "Hou Hui You Qi 后会有期" (see you later and in the future).

### 3. Martial Arts Greeting of Hand/Fist-Wrapping (known as "Bao Quan 抱拳")



This is a common etiquette in Chinese Martial Arts. The etiquette is known "Bao Quan Li 抱拳礼" (literally translated as "Fist Wrapping Rite". You will see this in Chinese Kungfu movie or in chinese martial arts sparring.

The common practice is as follow:

Stand Upright with the body straight. Clench your right fist. Straighten your left palm to have 4 fingers in plane, and your left thumb slightly bend. Wrap your two hands together (the left palm over the right clenched fist). Placed the two hands in front of your chest, but making sure that your two elbows do not come up.

There are philosophical martial arts meaning about this practice: The left palm (with 4 fingers) symbolizes Virtue, Wisdom, Health, Art, which are also called the "4 nurturing elements", symbolizing the spirit of Martial arts. The left thumb is slightly bent to mean that one should not be arrogant or always attempt to be no.1 . The right fist symbolizes rigorous practice. Since the right fist is clenched, it means a form of 'attack' but with the left palm wrapping it, it means "discipline" and 'restraint/control in order not to abuse the martial practice".



Another explanation is that the left hand symbolizes the "5 lakes 五湖" while the right fist clenched symbolizes "4 sea 四海"). When the left hand is placed onto the right hand, it means that "people in the 5 lakes and 4 seas are all brothers" (五湖四海皆兄弟). It's a practice to respect and prevent fighting among the different martial groups in the past.

#### **4. Bowing (also known as "Ketou 磕头" or Kowtow)**

Bowing was a form of ancient Chinese practice when a commoner or an



official greet an emperor. It was also practiced when a commoner greet an official (such as magistrate or someone in the Chinese bureaucracy). The common practice was to kneel down on the floor, and then bow with heads touching the ground

and two hands landing on the floor. Ketou (bowing) is only practiced today in Chinese religious ceremony/rituals such as ancestor worship, Daoist ceremony, Buddhist paying homage to the Buddha etc. The 90 degree bowing is however practiced in Japanese culture.